



Society of Environmental Journalists

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March 9, 2013

Cynthia L. Quarterman, Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
phmsa.administrator@dot.gov

Re: News Media Access to Mayflower Spill Site and Information

Dear Administrator Quarterman:

The Society of Environmental Journalists strongly objects to the threatened arrest last Friday of a reporter at the ExxonMobil oil pipeline spill in Mayflower, Ark., and the failure of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation to take legally mandated leadership positions in dealing with reporters, establish an accessible command center that was not on oil company property, and implement a coherent information policy.

SEJ believes the EPA and the other federal agencies made a big mistake by allowing the command center to be set up on Exxon property, especially without establishing ground rules for journalist access to the center and spill area. With Exxon officials in control, journalists were not permitted access to the command center, its parking lot or the areas affected by the spill. Exxon's primary duty should have been the management of its oil flow, not the flow of information to the public.

We also object to the no-fly zone above the spill site which further restricted reporting of this incident that had broad public health and environmental interest.

SEJ is requesting that the agencies involved provide a written explanation of their actions regarding the threatened arrest, who was responsible for the media information policy driven by the company and the imposition of the no-fly zone. SEJ is also requesting that the agencies meet with its representatives to work out a more open and fair information policy for use in future emergency response situations.

Sincerely,

Beth Parke, Executive Director

Joseph A. Davis, Director,
SEJ Watchdog Project



*Strengthening the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media
to advance public understanding of environmental issues*